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HUMAN RIGHTS QUESTIONS

Letter dated 20 June 1994 from the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

In accordance with General Assembly resolution 48/155 of 20 December 1993, I have the honour to inform you of Russia's position regarding the adoption of the law on citizenship in second reading by the Saeima of the Republic of Latvia on 9 June 1994.

The approval of the law, coming after the earlier enactment by the legislators of other laws which discriminate against the Russian-speaking population (on State service, on electioneering, additions to the law on the entry and stay of aliens, on the police), confirms the fears repeatedly expressed by the Russian Federation that the Latvian authorities are deliberately pursuing a policy of establishing a mono-ethnic State, and in so doing are purposely disregarding the actual situation in Latvia, the opinion of international experts and the recommendations of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, of the High Commissioner, Mr. van der Stoel, and of the Council of Europe regarding the situation of the non-indigenous population of Latvia.

The provisions of the law essentially consolidate the principle of naturalization quotas which has been rejected by international experts. According to the calculations of experts, only about one quarter of the approximately 800,000 non-citizens can expect to acquire citizenship of the Republic of Latvia by the year 2000. All the others will be accorded only the right to apply for citizenship in the twenty-first century on the basis of a quota not exceeding 0.1 per cent of the total number of citizens in the previous year, i.e., no more than 2,000 people a year.

* A/49/50/Rev.1.

Furthermore, the law does not contain clear time-frames for considering applications for citizenship, and does not ease, but actually tightens the requirements for compulsory examinations in the Latvian language, and also in the Constitution and history of Latvia.

It is significant that the law enshrines the principle of discrimination on grounds of nationality. Estonians and Lithuanians are granted a preferential regime for the priority submission of applications for naturalization up to 1 January 1996, while persons of other nationalities are denied such privileges.

The law therefore contains an additional mechanism for obstructing the naturalization process. It also maintains an extensive list of persons who are denied citizenship, opening the way for arbitrary actions. Thus the Latvian authorities are flagrantly disregarding the universally recognized standards in the area of human rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, not to mention the specific recommendations of international experts regarding Latvia to the effect that it is inadmissible for a situation to emerge whereby a significant proportion of the permanent residents of Latvia, including persons who were born there and wish to have citizenship, would become stateless through a caprice of the authorities.

The adoption of this law would reduce the prospects of developing an intercommunity dialogue and of achieving civil harmony in Latvian society, and would have an adverse effect on stability in the region and in Europe.

We call upon all States and international organizations to speak out with authority and prevent the adoption in Latvia of a law on citizenship which could have a very negative effect on the future of hundreds of thousands of permanent residents of Latvia and on their political, social and economic rights.

I should be grateful if you would have the text of this letter circulated as an official document of the General Assembly under item 104 of the preliminary list.

(Signed) Y. VORONTSOV